XV

A SERMON

Preached on the FEAST of the

ANNUNCIATION

OF THE

B. Virgin Mary,

AT

St Martins in the Fields, *Westminster.*

BY

JOHN MILL, M. A.

Fellow of *Queens Colledge Oxon.*

In the *SAVOY:*

Printed by THO. NEWCOMB, MDCLXXVI.

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St. Luke, Chap. 1. Verſ. 28.

And the Angel came in unto Her, and ſaid, Hail, Thou that art highly favour'd, the Lord is with Thee: Bleſſed art Thou among Women.

Great is the Myſtery of Godlineſs, 1 Tim. 3. 16.
ſays St. *Paul*; *God Manifeſted in the Fleſh, Juſtified in the Spirit, Seen of Angels, Preached unto the Gentiles, Believed on in the World, Received up into Glory.* Myſterious Doctrines theſe indeed, and ſuch as tranſcend the Capacities of Men I do not ſay, (thoſe poor ſhallow Creatures *who hardly* Wiſd. 19. 16.
gueſs aright at things upon Earth, and with labour find even the things that are before them;) but alſo of the Holy Angels of God. Thoſe Glorious Spirits, who are all Flame and Intelligence, cannot arrive to the Knowledge of them; are not allow'd as much as a Glimpſe into theſe Depths of our Holy Religion. Deſire they may and do, as St. *Peter* tells us, to pry a little into 1 Pet. 1. 12.
theſe Goſpel-*Arcana*; but can by no means have their Curioſity gratifi'd: Any Wiſdom inferiour to that of God, being uncapable of a full Com-

prehenſion and Underſtanding of them. The reaſon is plain: *For what Man*, ſays the great Apoſtle, *knows* even *the Things of a Man*, our poor inconſiderable Thoughts and Deſigns, *ſave*
1 Cor. 2. 11. *the Spirit of a Man which is in him? Even ſo the Things, the deep Things of God knows no Man*, (nor for the ſame reaſon any Creature elſe) *but*
Verſ. 10. *the Spirit of God.* And yet God hath *revealed Them unto us*, ſays the ſame Apoſtle. He has ſo; But how? and in what meaſure? He has not explained the Modes and Reaſons of Goſpel-Myſteries ſurely; Thoſe are, and will, even in Heaven, remain to us Unintelligible: But acquainted us meerly with the Truth and Reality of them, and diſcovered what thoſe Supernatural Doctrines of Faith are, by Extraordinary Revelation. A Revelation, to go on with St. *Paul*, as early as the Prophetic Writings, wherein the Apoſtle affirms them to be declar'd: *The My-*
Rom. 16. 25. *ſtery of the Goſpel*, ſays he, *was* a thing *hid from Ages, and from Generations, kept ſecret ſince the World began; but is now, by the Scriptures of the Prophets, made known, and manifeſted to all Nations, for the Obedience of Faith.* A Truth undoubtedly clear and evident, as far as concerns the Promiſes of a *Meſſiah*, (*i. e.*) of our Bleſſed Saviours Miſſion into the World, which

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are in the old Propheſies moſt expreſly deliver-ed: but if extended to the ſeveral Doctrines touching his Perſon, can only be true in this ſenſe, that the *Fulneſs of Time* was able to interpret thoſe Ancient Records ſo, as to diſcover in them even theſe Doctrines too. The Birth, Life, Actions and Sufferings of our *Saviour* ſpread a ſenſible Light over thoſe Ancient Volumes, and made theſe Eſſential Truths of the Goſpel appear, otherwiſe or not at all, or very hardly diſcernable. The Truth is, there is ſo much Obſcurity in their Manifeſtations of them, (if I may ſo ſpeak without abſurdity) that 'tis almoſt as difficult out of the Prophets to conclude the Reality of any ſuch Myſteries, as 'tis impoſſible to underſtand the Natures of them. For to inſtance in that one, which more particularly relates to the preſent Feſtival, I mean the Myſterious Incarnation of our Lord: This Truth, I confeſs, was in ſome ſort delivered to our firſt Parents, in that promiſe of *bruiſing the Serpents Head by the Seed of the Woman:* But this was a wonderfull dark Inſinuation of the Myſtery. I grant alſo, that *Abraham* had ſome Knowledge of this Matter; (our Saviour himſelf atteſts ſo much, *Joh.* 8. 56.) So likewiſe had the Patriarchs, and ſeveral Godly Men, in the firſt Ages Gen. 3. 15.

of the World. They embrac'd This among many other things of the Goſpel; nay, *they ſaw them*, ſays the Author to the *Hebrews*, Chap. 11. v. 13. but then 'twas πόῤῥωθεν, *a far off*, at a vaſt diſtance, and ſo implies a very Inadequate and ſmall Diſcovery. The Prophet *Iſaiah* may ſeem indeed to have had a much clearer and more advantagious view of Chriſt Incarnate, in his account of it, Ch. 7. v. 14. *Behold, a Virgin ſhall conceive, and bear a Son, and ſhall call his Name Immanuel.* For if the Prediction relate to *Chriſt*, then the Prophet knew that the Mother of our Lord was to be a *Virgin*. But that the *Virgin* there mentioned, was to Typifie the *Virgin Mary*, and the *Immanuel* to be born, our *bleſſed Saviour*, we have only the warrant of a *Myſtical Interpretation*, made indeed by St. *Matthew*, Chap. 1. v. 23. and ſo moſt undoubtedly true; but ſuch as otherwiſe we ſhould never have thought upon; the plain Letter of the Text only pointing out to a Child, to be born immediately after the Propheſie, (whoever he was) as a Sign to King *Ahaz*, that *Jeruſalem* ſhould be ſecured from the Arms of the Kings of *Iſrael* and *Syria*. So that for all the Prophetical accounts of this and the like Doctrines of Faith, we are like to be left infinitely in the dark, unleſs

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the Divine Goodneſs unfolds what they wrap'd up in Types, and diſplays the Truth of them in ſuch an evident manner, as may procure and eſtabliſh a belief of them in the minds of Men.

But bleſſed be God, who will not ſuffer the World to remain under the Prophetic Shades, and continue ignorant of the Principles of Chriſtianity any longer. It ſuffic'd the Wiſdom of Heaven to have kept theſe Glorious Things unknown in a manner during the *Moſaic Oeconomy*. But now the *fulneſs of time* is come, when the *Myſterious Abyſs* of the Goſpel ſhall be broken up, and the *Glories of Chriſtianity* appear in ſo eminent and illuſtrious a manner, *that all the Ends of the World may ſee the Salvation of God*. The Grand Deſign of Heaven is to be laid open, and unravel'd ſucceſſively, in all the Parts and Branches of it.

The firſt of them, and Foundation of all the reſt, I mean the *Manifeſtation of God in the Fleſh*, was explain'd to us this very day, by the Meſſage of an Angel; God ſent one of thoſe bleſſed Spirits from Heaven, on purpoſe to inform us who was ה עלמה *That Virgin*, (as the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſtyl'd her by way of Eminency) that bleſſed Woman of all the World, who was to

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be the *Mother* of our Lord. And who was this *Virgin*, think ye, who was to be Christ's Mother? and to whom upon that account, so extraordinary an Embassy was dispatch'd? Some *great* and and *noble Personage* certainly, highly eminent for her *Extraction* and *Quality*. No such matter, but on the quite contrary, a poor mean Daughter of *Israel*; expressing indeed in her Name something of *Ladyship*, (for so much St. *Jerom* tells us the word *Mary* imports in the *Syriac*) but in reality of very low condition. Lord! how thou despisest those things which in the opinion of the World pass for *great* and *honourable*! how thou delightest to dignifie the most excellent grace of *Humility*, by this and all the other circumstances of thy *Incarnation*! A *lowly Hand-maiden* she was, (as she styles herself in her *Magnificat*, v. 48.) in whom before all the Princesses of the Earth, our blessed Lord was pleased to invest himself with *Flesh*, and become an Infant. Of this astonishing *Mystery* the Angel *Gabriel* gives her solemn notice, v. 31. and out of an admiration of the infinite Honour our Saviour was about to do her, before he delivered his message, he addresses himself to the Holy Virgin in this affectionate Salutation: *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*

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Which words admit a twofold Interpretation: for they may be taken either in a plain *Indicative* ſenſe, and ſo they expreſly denote the tranſcendent Glories and Priviledges of the bleſſed Virgin; or elſe they may bear a ſenſe *Apprecative*, as the Learned *Gratius* and others are of opinion they do, and ſo they are expounded to be a Salutatory form of ſpeech, wherein the Angel *Gabriel* moſt heartily congratulates her upon the ſubject of her wonderful Conception, whereof he is come on purpoſe to give her an aſſurance, and wiſhes her thereupon all the joy and happineſs imaginable. And thus the Reverend Doctor *Hammond* paraphraſes the words in this manner: *Hail, Gracious Perſon, the Lord of Heaven be with thee; and let all men ever account thee the moſt bleſſed woman in the world.* In either acceptation of the words, the Glorious Saint of this day is ſufficiently inſinuated to be the Grand Favourite of Heaven; ſuch a woman as all the Generations of the Earth ſhould have reaſon to celebrate, and eſteem moſt happy.

Let us now meditate upon, and conſider ('tis, or ought to be, the religious exerciſe of this *Feſtival*) the great and noble Character here given her. Let us firſt of all fix our thoughts

thoughts upon the high Honour God has vouchsafed her. And then, in the second place, in Consideration of that, and of her singular Endowments and Graces, pay to her memory all due Veneration and Respect: To the first part of this Religious Duty, we have a prevalent Motive in the first words of the Text; to the latter in the close of the Angels Salutation.

1. *Mary* is here stiled κεχαριτωμένη, or *highly favoured*, and *accepted of God*: for so we render the word congruously to the sense of it in the best *Greek Authors*, and to the mind of *Gabriel*, who tells her that she had *found favour with God*. Though I am not ignorant that other Interpretations are fastned upon the word. Our Protestant Divines, many of them, rendring it *gratis dilecta*; the Romanists generally *gratiosa*, or *gratia plena*: neither of them so much out of respect, as I conceive, to the meaning of the word in this place, as out of a design to countenance their own particular *Hypotheses*. Not to stand therefore upon Critical Niceties, certain it is, that highly *grac'd* and *favour'd* she was; in so transcendent a manner, that we cannot fix our Meditations upon the Honour done her, in all its several *ennobling* and *exalting* Circumstances, without being swallow'd up with Admiration. We Vers. 30.

cannot

cannot trace the Divine Love to Her through the various Mazes and Labyrinths of it, without losing our selves in so profound a Speculation.

We shall in the following Discourse, consider her as *highly favour'd* upon these two accounts:

I. Upon account of our blessed Lords *Incarnation.*

II. Upon account of those Excellent *Graces* and *Virtues* wherewith she was in a most eminent manner dignified and accomplish'd.

I. Upon account of our blessed Lords *Incarnation.* Will God indeed come *down from Heaven, the Habitation of his Holiness and of his Glory,* and converse with Dust and Ashes? Yes; and what is infinitely more, he will take upon him the very Nature and Infirmities of a *Man.* And the blessed *Virgin* is to be the *Woman* in whom the whole *Mystery* of this Incarnation is to be transacted. The *Holy Ghost shall come upon her, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow her,* Vers. 35. *And that Holy Thing which shall be born of her, shall be* Essentially *God, God blessed for ever,* Rom. 9. 5. Amazing News! I.

And such as had the Angel acquainted Us with, as he did Mary, supposing us to have known as little what was to befal her, as herself did before that extraordinary Message, think whether we should have believ'd him, and not rather have resolv'd all into meer absurdity and contradiction. Nay, but *with God nothing is impossible*, says the Angel, Vers. 37. Well then, suppose for once a Conviction of the Possibility of the thing: Suppose the *Manifestation of God in Flesh* Practicable; that is to say, that *Infinity* could be circumscrib'd in the *Womb*, *Eternity* commence in *Time*, *Omnipotency* be surrounded with *Weakness*, the *Ancient of Days* become a *Child* of a Span long; (and yet the Conception of Them is ready to crack our Faculties:) Suppose, I say, the Possibility of all these things; and then consider how highly Dignified she must be, who is to be the *Illustrious Subject* of all these *Miracles*. The Woman, who by peculiar Designation is to carry Divinity in her Womb, and become the *Mother of God*. Lord! what shall we say? She is inexpressibly far above either Saints or *Angels*. The grand instance of a Creature on whom the Almighty has accumulated all the Greatness and Honour consistent with a Created Capacity, a Finite Nature.

Dan. 7. 9.

Quæ vel Angelica puritas Illi audeat comparari, quæ digna fuit Spiritus Sacrarium *fieri & habitaculum filii Dei?* S. Bern. de Assump. Serm. 4.

Virgo

Virgo Mater! (as a pious Father harangues it upon this Argument) *Illa majorem Deus facere non potest: Majorem Mundum potest facere Deus: Majorem autem Matrem quam Matrem Dei non potest facere Deus.* God cannot, says he, *create a greater Creature than a Virgin Mother.* God can *make a larger World,* (a thousand Worlds if it pleases him) *but to make a greater Mother than the Mother of God, is perfectly Impossible.* Blessed Saint! how beyond all Imagination highly hath the Lord *regarded thy low condition!* How far hath he advanced Thee above the whole Creation in point of Honour and Dignity! The Glorious Angels which attend upon his Throne, were the Creatures he wholly passed by, when he came down and Impregnated Thee by the Holy Ghost. His dearest Servants are but small Sharers in his Favour, when compared to Thee, who didst possess even the whole *Divinity.* *Moses* had the Honour to *talk with God,* with the like familiarity, as a *Man talketh with his Friend,* and was earnest to have a *sight of his Glory,* but was deny'd it, as not being able to endure so dazling a Lustre. The Prophets likewise had some converse with Heaven; but was usually by secret Inspirations and Dreams, in an imperfect manner. Several Persons are Recorded in

Exod. 33. 11, 18, 20.

Scripture to have been *filled with the Holy Ghost*. And indeed every good Christian may be said to be *Partaker of the Divine Nature*, 2 Pet. 1. 4. To *have put on Christ*, Gal. 3. 17. Nay, to have *Christ formed in him*, Gal. 4. 19. in a Spiritual sense. But the Blessed *Virgin* was the Person alone of all the World, in whom the Almighty would, not by the Gifts and Graces of his Spirit only, but *Essentially, Locally, Properly* reside; whose Womb was to be the real Receptacle and Temple of God, and in whom was to *dwell all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. 1 Joh. 3. 1. *Behold*, says St. John, *what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God*. If so great be the love of God to us by making us his Sons, what must That be whereby he made the *Blessed Virgin* (besides the favours he enjoys in common with the best of Christians) our Saviours Mother? We are his Sons only in a Qualified and Spiritual Notion; but she is in Truth and Reality the *Mother of God*. This is her Title, and this is her Memorial for all Generations. So that now we shall adventure to take up again the Angels Salutation, and say, *Hail Thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with Thee: Blessed art Thou among Women*. *Highly favoured*: And that not

only

only upon account of our blessed Lords Incarnation; the Reason hitherto insisted on; but also,

II. Upon the score of those Excellent *Graces* and *Vertues* wherewith she was, in a very eminent degree, dignified and accomplish'd. God might, 'tis true, had it so pleas'd Him, have made choice of any other, even Unsanctified Virgin, as well as the *Virgin Mary*, wherein to transact the Mysterious Incarnation of his Son. And I know very well there are a sort of ill-natur'd, Fanatical Spirits, who will not allow this Holy Woman any Extraordinary Grace, nay indeed not any Civil Respect upon the account of this her Honourable Relation. She was, say they, beloved merely *gratis*, without the least respect had to any peculiar Graces and Qualifications she could pretend to. An Assertion so far true indeed, that her Piety could not challenge either This, or any other Divine Favour, strictly and by way of *Merit*; but if so extended as to exclude the Singular Eye or Respect God had to her Vertues and Graces in so grand an Affair as this was, is an absurd and unworthy Doctrine. For if (according to the Wise mans Aphorism) *into a Malicious Soul Wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in the Body that* II. Wisd. 1. 4.

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is subject unto Sin; 'tis infinitely grosse to imagine that our Blessed Lord, who is *the Wisdom of the Father*, should inhabit the Body, and cloath Himself with the Flesh and Blood of an Irreligious Woman. Far be this from our Conceptions. The Holy JESUS undoubtedly had a very tender and special regard not only to *the low estate*, (Vers. 48.) but much more to the Piety of this Hand-maiden whom he design'd for his Mother.

1 Cor. 1. 24.

Not that I would here be thought in the least wise to affirm the *Blessed Mary* perfectly free from all Actual Sin, much less from Original Corruption. I leave such Anti-Scriptural Doctrines to be Established by the Council of *Trent*, and Preach'd up by the *Franciscan Fryars*. We have no warrant for any Magnificent Strains of that kind concerning her. Having on the contrary as good Assurance, as Scripture can give us, that all Men (the *Virgin Mary* no where excepted) are *conceived and born in Sin*. All that I aim at is this, that the *Mother of our Blessed Saviour* was an eminently Religious and Holy Woman. And truly we need not go far for an Argument of this Truth. St. *Luke* has in this very Chapter given us a sufficient account of her Graces. The History of the Annunciation repre-

Conc. Trid. Sess. 5 Art. 5. ad finem.

Rom. 5. 12.

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senting to us these several Particulars.

1. Her *Chastity*; She was a *Virgin*, (V. 29.) one that *knew not a Man*, (V. 34.) free from all carnal Uncleanness and Pollution: Her Mind and Body entirely pure and Immaculate; not in the least measure sullied and ruffled by Lust; and consequently devoid of what might otherwise have alienated her from the Divine Love, and render'd her Body an unfit Temple for the God of all Purity to inhabit.

2. Her *Humility* and *Modesty*; Vertues express'd in her behaviour towards the Angel, (V. 29.) *When she saw him*, says the Evangelist, *she was troubled at his saying; and cast in her mind what manner of Salutation this should be. She was troubled at his saying.* Poor Virgin! The Angels Complyment is in all Circumstances too big for her *Modesty*; The Address in her Apprehension, most infinitely unsuitable to a Woman of her low Rank and Condition in the World. What! An Angel clad all in Robes of Glory, come to visit a poor mean Daughter of *Israel*? Can it be that Heaven should in Her, of all the Women in the World, find any thing that might incline God to respect and favour Her? She blushes upon the Angels Address; Sees and hears herself highly magnifi'd; Thinks upon

Quod urbane est, Verecundiæ fuit. S. Bernard. Serm. 3. *super Missus est.*

upon the Message deeply; Considers it again and again: But after all, cannot apprehend any thing in herself, which may in any wise correspond to the Angels Character: Her Modesty will not allow her to understand the least part of the Import of the Angels Salutation. How she of all others should be the great Favourite of Heaven, advanc'd and honour'd above all her Sex, a Person to be celebrated throughout all Ages, she cannot imagine. And as for her *Humility*, 'twas the same after her Exaltation as before. In her *Magnificat*, she expresses herself sensible of her low Condition; and takes occasion to meditate upon, and adore the Mercy of God, who rejects *the Proud, but gives Grace* and Honour *to the Humble. He hath scattered*, says she, *the Proud in the Imagination of their Hearts. He hath put down the Mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the Humble and Meek*, Vers. 51, 52. Her Humility was one of the principal Graces which procur'd her this favour. God delights in this Grace in a peculiar manner; Loves those, and only those that are *Humble*: He loves and lives with them. *Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth Eternity, whose Name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy Place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble Spirit, to revive*

1 Pet. 5. 5.

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the Spirit of the Humble, and to revive the Heart of the Contrite Ones, Isai. 57. 15.

The next Grace observable in the *Virgin Mary*, is her *Faith*, expres'd Vers. 38. *Behold*, says she, *the Handmaid of the Lord; Be it unto me according to thy Word.* She *staggers not at the promise of God through unbelief*, (to apply to her St. *Pauls* words concerning *Abraham* upon a much-like Argument) *but is strong in Faith, giving Glory to God; and being fully perswaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform.* Rom. 4. 20, 21. The Consideration of Omnipotency removes all Doubts and Difficulties. To be a Mother without knowing a Man, is a strong Objection against her Faith: But that GOD can do in this case, as well as any other, what transcends our Imaginations, is on the other hand as much out of question. And if he say he Will do it, the Divine Veracity, which is as infallible as his Power is infinite, is engag'd to a performance. And so she's undoubtedly assured that it must be so, though she cannot tell how. And thereupon she acquiesceth in what the Angel had told her, without any further Hesitancy or Contradiction: *Behold*, says she, freely resigning up herself to the Divine Pleasure, *Behold the Handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

But I shall not insist any longer upon the Variety of Gifts and Graces wherewith the blessed Virgin was Endow'd; but shall only take notice of the profound Reverence and Honour which Antiquity paid Her in that Celebrated Opinion of theirs, That after she had given the consent just now mentioned, *Be it unto me according to thy word*, She was by singular Priviledge kept secure from all Actual Sin during her whole Life. An Opinion, I confess, entertainable without any prejudice to our *Holy Faith*, and such as the *Fathers* who embrac'd it, took up certainly out of the great and awful Regard they had to the Dignity and Person of our Saviour; but such as has not the least Foundation in Scripture, and therefore may reasonably be laid aside, among many other ungrounded Ejaculations, and over-officious Praises of a Saint, too honourably and advantageously represented in the Gospel as to her *Vertue* and *Piety*, to need the Accession of our groundless extravagant Commendations.

And if we cannot account the Zeal of some Ancient Fathers of the Church so discreet as well-meaning in this particular; What shall we say of that Abominable Superstition, which has induc'd the Church of *Rome* and her Doctors to

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ſally out ſo far in the Praiſes of the *Virgin Mary*, as to Romance her into a Deity? to attribute to her Divine Perfections, and to pay her that Religious Worſhip which belongs only to God?

She was, ſays the Angel κεχαριτωμένη, that is, ſay they, *Gratia plena*, *Full of Grace*. And a very Gracious Perſon ſhe was undoubtedly; ſo far we concur, and here we muſt leave them. For they go on, and with a Confidence befitting the Worſhippers of *Saints and Angels*, mention'd by the Apoſtle, *Col.* 2. 18. who ſhould *boldly intrude into thoſe things which they had not ſeen*; They affirm that her *Fulneſs of Grace* was ſuch, that ſhe was able to communicate it to any that wanted; in the very ſame manner, as our Saviour ſays, that as *the Father had Life in Himſelf*, *ſo had he given to the Son to have Life in Himſelf*. Nay, *Suarez* the Jeſuite is wonderfully Nice and Critical in ſtating this *Plenitude*, and giving us an exact Eſtimate of it. *The Grace of the* Virgin Mary (ſays he, upon the the Popiſh *Hypotheſis* of her Immaculate Conception) *was greater in the very firſt moment ſhe was conceiv'd, than the Grace of the higheſt Angel, and conſequently merited more than a thouſand Men can merit all their Life long. Now this Grace of hers receiv'd*

Joh. 5. 26.

3. Part. Diſp. 18. Sect. 4.

a continual Increaſe as long as ſhe liv'd; in ſuch a manner, that in the firſt inſtant of her Conception, her Grace excell'd that of the higheſt Angel, who by one or two Acts compleated his Merits. In the ſecond inſtant, her Grace was doubl'd, and ſo was twice as Excellent and Meritorious as the former. In the third inſtant four times, in the fourth eight times as much as the firſt; and ſo on according to Geometrical Proportion. So that the Grace of every inſtant doubling its foregoing Grace from the moment in which ſhe was conceiv'd, till the time of her Nativity; and afterwards every Act of Grace being in like manner twice as excellent as its precedent Act, till the Seventy Second Year of her Age, wherein ſhe died; She was ſo far advanc'd in Goodneſs and Merit, as to have more Grace and Merit than the whole Society of Men and Angels put together; She is dearer to God than the whole Reaſonable Creation; He loves her more than the Univerſal Church. What odd Metaphyſical Notions are theſe! And yet a World of ſuch Inſignificant and Non-ſenſical Traſh we meet with in the School-men: Who in their Diſcourſes relating to the *Holy Virgin*, thought they could never be Romantic enough in deſcribing the Praiſes, and advancing (after their dull rugged faſhion) the Merits of a Saint, whom the

Church

Church of *Rome* had in ſo ſingular a manner made the Object of a Religious Adoration. But I ſhall wave at preſent any farther purſuit of theſe, and the like Superſtitious Fopperies, whereby whilſt they would be thought to magnifie the *Mother of our Lord*, they do really expoſe Chriſt himſelf and his Goſpel to ſcorn and contempt; contenting my ſelf with what has been ſaid already concerning the high Honour done her in making her ſo miraculouſly Inſtrumental in our *Lords Incarnation*; and beſtowing upon her ſuch eminent Gifts and Graces. The Contemplation of this tranſcendent Dignity of the *Virgin*, was I told you, one Branch of this Days Religious Exerciſe. Conc. Trid. Seſſ. 25. Art. 2.

2. The ſecond part of our Duty conſiſts in the Celebration of her Memory, or in expreſſing to her upon account of her eminent *Vertue* and *Goodneſs*, all due Reſpect and Veneration. The bleſſed Angel, you ſee, did this in his Addreſs to her; *Hail, Thou that art highly favour'd, the Lord is with Thee: Bleſſed art Thou among Women. Bleſſed art Thou*; i. e. Let all Men Honour Thee, as an ever bleſſed Saint. Indeed, who can ſeriouſly reflect upon her wonderful Relation to God, who can truly love our *Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, and not entertain a moſt Profoundly

Reverend

Reverend Esteem of Her, whose *Womb bare Him*, and whose *Paps He sucked?* If the Woman in the Gospel was to have a Perpetual Memorial for breaking her Box of Spikenard, and pouring it upon our Saviours head, *Mark* 14. 9. of what Honour shall She be thought worthy, who was the very *Mother of God?* How lasting and precious ought her Name to be among us, by whom God brought forth Christ into the World, and convey'd to Us the Benefits of our Redemption?

But how must we declare and manifest the great Esteem and Honour we have for the Blessed Virgin?

To this I answer, 1. *Negatively*; 2. *Positively.*

1. *Negatively.* We are not to express the great Esteem we have of Her by a *Religious Worship*, or such a sort of *Adoration* as we pay unto God. We are not to ascribe to her such Perfections as are proper to the Deity, nor pray to, or call upon her in any case or exigency whatsoever. *For it is written, Thou shalt Worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.* Matth. 4. 10. *He is the God hearing Prayer, and therefore to Him,* Psal. 65. 2. and Him alone, *shall all Flesh come.* St. *John* indeed *fell down at the feet of the Angel to wor-*

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ſhip him, Rev. 19. 10. But receiv'd a Reprimend for his Inconſiderate Zeal: *See thou do it not*, ſays the Angel; *I am thy Fellow-ſervant, and of thy Brethren that have the Teſtimony of Jeſus: Worſhip God.* And certainly εἴτις Ἄιδησις, if the *Bleſſed Virgin* now in Heaven have any Knowledge of what is done here below; if ſhe ſees the many Shrines and Altars erected to her, and hears the Prayers and Devotions offer'd up continually by ſtupid and ſuperſtitious Votaries; ſhe cannot but infinitely diſdain the Religious Homage paid her, ſo much in Derogation to God and his Chriſt: A Worſhip which has not the leaſt countenance from *Sacred Writ*; there being in thoſe holy Books neither *Precept* nor *Example* of Devotion in this kind. Our Saviour is ſo far from enjoyning the Worſhipping of Her, that he reſtrains upon all occaſions all extravagant apprehenſions of the Honour due to her, as foreſeeing the proneneſs of ſucceeding Ages to Superſtition in this matter. When he was told that his *Mother and his Brethren ſtood without*; *Who*, ſaith he, *are my Mother and my Brethren? He that doth the Will of my Father, the ſame is my Mother, and Siſter, and Brother.* And when the Woman brake forth into that Rapture concerning the *Bleſſed Mother of our Lord*;

Blessed is the Womb that bare Thee, and the Paps which Thou hast sucked: Our Saviour diverts it to another thing; *Yea rather blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.* Nor do the Apostles give us the least advice of addressing our selves to the *Virgin*, and making use of her Intercession; nay, they have not so much as once mentioned her Name in all their Epistles. Now if the Worship of the *Blessed Virgin* had been a thing in practise from the beginning, can it with any colour of reason be imagin'd, that our Saviour and his Apostles would have been silent in so considerable a part of Religion? The truth is, 'tis so far from *Apostolic* or *Primitive*, that neither the Scriptures, nor the Christian Writers for the first three hundred years, give any countenance at all to this sort of Devotion. To be plain; This Superstitious Practice began about the middle of the fourth Century; and *Epiphanius*, who liv'd about that time, particularly calls it (as he might have done a great many more) *The Heresie of Women.* There were in his days certain devout Women of *Arabia*, who, as an instance of their Worship of the *Blessed Virgin*, offer'd up to this *Queen of Heaven* (as they thought her) certain *Cakes* call'd *Collyrides*, whence they had the name of *Collyridian*

Epiphan. contr. Hæres. lib. 3. Hær. 79.

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Heretiques. The Good Father hearing of this prepoſterous Devotion of theirs, inveighs with all poſſible vehemency againſt that Superſtitious Practice; accounting it *Damnable and Diabolical*, and the Perſons devoted to it, no better than thoſe that *attend to Seducing Spirits, and Doctrines of Dæmons.* And then he ſtates the Worſhip due to the *Virgin Mary*, thus: *Mary*, ſays he, *was a Virgin, 'tis true; nay more,* τετιμημένη, *a very Honourable Virgin;* ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς προσκύνησιν ἡμῖν δεδεῖσα, *but ſhe is not propos'd to us as an Object of Religious Worſhip.* Καὶ ἡ παλλὰς ἡ Μαρία, ἡ ἁγία, ἡ τετιμημένη, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς τὸ προσκυνεῖσθαι, ſays the ſame Father, *Though* Mary *be a moſt Excellent, Holy and Venerable Woman, yet is ſhe by no means capable of a Religious Adoration.* And again, Ἡ Μαρία ἐν τιμῇ, ὁ Κύριος προσκυνείσθω, *Let the Virgin be Reverenc'd, but God only Worſhipp'd.* So Zealous was *Epiphanius* in the matter of the *Virgins* Invocation, a piece of Superſtition before his time not known in the World. 1 Tim. 4. 1.

What would he have ſaid, had he ſeen this Idolatry of Worſhipping the *Virgin*, (of calling upon her, and imploring her Mediation with Chriſt) grown into ſuch a general Reputation, as to be Univerſally Practis'd, and Eſtabliſh'd by

Conc. Trid. Sess. 25. Art. 2. the *Law* of a Church, which Glories in the style of *Catholic*? His Spirit undoubtedly upon Observation of the Churches, Shrines and Altars Erected to her Devotion, (as St. *Pauls* once was) would have been stirr'd within him, when he should have seen not only one particular City, but a whole Church wholly *given to* this and many other Branches of *Idolatry*: The *Idols* or *Images* set up in Honour of the *Blessed Virgin*, being infinitely more numerous, than those the great *Apostle* saw at *Athens*, and both made use of to the same Religious Ends and Purposes.

Indeed the *Romish Superstition* relating to the *Blessed Mary*, as 'tis now practis'd, is infinitely too gross and absurd, to be in any tolerable manner accounted for, and justified. 'Tis wholly Anti-Scriptural; and 'tis evident the Church of Christ knew nothing at all of it for above three hundred years after our Saviour. Alas! The several Periods of the *Rise* and *Growth* of this *Superstitious Folly* and *Will-Worship*, as to all the parts of it, are too notorious, to allow it the least Pretensions to Antiquity. The Council of *Ephesus*, towards the beginning of the fourth Century, gave her indeed the style of Θεοτόκος, or *Mother of God*, in Opposition to the *Nestorian Heresie*: And I know very well that in

Anno 431.

the Ages immediately ſucceeding, they fell to making loſty and unreaſonably high Harangues in her Commendation. But 'twas above a thouſand years after Chriſt before any *Daily Office* was Inſtituted to Her. And a long time after that was it ere the Doctrine of her *Immaculate Conception* appear'd in the World. The *Canons* of *Lyons* are the firſt Men upon Record, who inſerted that Doctrine into their *Eccleſiaſtical Offices*; and are upon that account ſharply reprehended by St. *Bernard*. About three hundred years ago *Duns Scotus* a School-Doctor reviv'd That Opinion, and propos'd it as a thing meerly probable. In favour of it Pope *Sixtus* the Fourth afterwards Publiſhed a *Bull*, which was finally Approv'd and Ratifi'd by the Council of *Trent*. So that She now paſſes among the *Romaniſts* (if they be true to the Decrees of their Church) for a *Virgin perfectly free from Original Sin*; not to mention the ſeveral other Prerogatives and Perfections they have out of very great kindneſs doubtleſs fix'd upon Her. They ſtyle her in their *Miſſals* and *Offices*, *The Queen of Heaven*, *The Empreſs of the World*, *The Ladder of Paradiſe*, *The Gate of Salvation*, *The Mediatrix between God and Man*, *The Saviour by whom God hath ſent Redemption unto*

his People, A Goddess, The Omnipotent Lady, &c. And the peculiar Offices which have been instituted to her, are so extreamly Wild and Blasphemous, that I cannot mention what they speak of the *Virgin*, without offence to this Intelligent and Noble Auditory.

Bonavent. A *Cardinal* of the *Romish Church*, who Compiled the *Ladies Psalter*, (as they call it) has taken the liberty very fairly to *Burlesque* the *Psalms* of *David*, and roundly to apply and direct to the *Holy Virgin* all those Noble Hymns, and most Pious Ejaculations and Prayers which the *Royal Psalmist* presented to Almighty God. So Indiscreet a Thing is Superstition, that whilst it labours to Gratifie and Please God, it blindly falls upon such means in order thereto, as do most highly disoblige and dishonour Him.

Blessed Saint! Is this the Respect and Honour which Thou requirest of Us, to build Thee Shrines and Temples, and then to pay to Thee in Them a Religious Worship? To offer up at Thy Altars our Devotions and Prayers, to run over our *Rosaries*, to say Ten *Ave Maries* for One *Pater Noster*; *i. e.* to make Ten Addresses to Thee, for One Prayer directed to Almighty God? (and this is the proportion observed in the *Romish Devotions*.) In a word, to transfer upon

Thee the *Religious Reverence* due to God as his own Peculiar Prerogative? Surely no. This is a ſort of *Complaiſance* or *Humility* (as the Apoſtle ſpeaks in the caſe of *Angel Worſhip*) which cannot poſſibly be grateful to Thee. We cannot imagine that Thou canſt at all delight in receiving (if yet Thou art capable of receiving) from Us thoſe *Religious Services*, which we cannot pay Thee, without Injuring and Affronting Thy MAKER. We dare not preſent to Thee our *Petitions* and *Prayers*; becauſe they are due to God only. We dare not implore Thy Favour in Interceding for Us to Thy Son; becauſe we have an Immediate *Advocate with the Father*, JESUS CHRIST *the Righteous*. But This we will do; We will give Thee all the Honour that poſſibly we can, on this ſide *Religious Worſhip*. We will Extol Thy Graces, magnifie that Infinite Mercy which raiſed Thee to the Dignity of being the *Mother of God*: And laſt of all, Imitate as far as we can, Thy *Admirable Goodneſs and Piety*. And this is the true way of declaring the Veneration we have for the *Bleſſed Virgin*. Our *Eſteem* of Her is to be expreſſed not in a *Religious Worſhip*: But,

Col. 2. 18.

1 Joh. 2. 1.

2. *Poſitively*. In the *Celebration* and *Imitation* of her *Vertues* and *Graces*. If we affectionately cele-

Celebrate her *Memory*, Praise and Admire her *Graces*, and endeavour to transcribe them in our Lives and Actions, we do her as much Honour as is possible. We have hitherto consider'd her manifold *Graces*, pray let us forthwith fall to Imitation and Practice. Let Us follow her even in her *Virginal Chastity*; remembring that the God of Purity would be born of none but a *Virgin*: That they were *Virgins* who had the Honour to sing *a new* and peculiar *Song before the Throne, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*, Rev. 14. 3, 4. Or however, let us be *Conjugally Chaste*; and not by Lust and Folly defile and prophane our Bodies, which ought to be *the Temples of the Holy Ghost*; nor make the *Members of Christ*, for such these of ours are by Mystical Union, *the Members of an Harlot*. Let us Imitate her *Humility*, the very Crown of all Christian Graces, that wherein our Lord chiefly delights. *Learn of me*, says he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart*, Matth 11. 29. The Lord chose a meek and humble Woman for his *Mother*. A Lesson to those in particular, whom St. *Peter* in one of his Epistles makes it his business to accomplish. But how? *Let their Adorning*, says he, *not be that Adorning of Plaiting the Hair, and of Wearing of* Costly *Apparel: but let it be*

1 Pet. 3. 3, 4.

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the hidden Man of the Heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit, which is in the ſight of God of great price.

What ſhall I ſay more? In every thing wherein we find her excellent, let us tread her Steps; and this will be indeed to Celebrate This *Feſtival.* We may Imitate her even in this *Myſterious Conception* of our Saviour. We are capable of the Honour of having *Chriſt formed in us*, Gal. 4. 19. Of being *Partakers of the Divine* Life and *Nature*, 2 Pet. 1. 4. Of having Chriſt *dwell in our Hearts*, Epheſ. 3. 17. Of being *the Temples of the Holy Ghoſt*, 1 Cor. 6. 19. In fine, we are capable, in our Saviours account, of greater Bleſſedneſs than that which accrew'd to the *Holy Virgin* upon the ſcore of her being the *Lords Mother: Bleſſed is the Womb that bare Him, and the Paps which He ſucked: But rather bleſſed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it. He that doth the Will of my Father, the ſame*, ſays Chriſt, *is my Brother, and Siſter, and* MOTHER.

GOD Grant that We may all of Us ſo perfectly expreſs our *Love* and *Relation* to CHRIST by a Sincere, Conſtant, Uniform Obſervance of His Commands, that together with the *Holy Mother of our Lord*, and all the Company of *Saints* and *Angels*, We may enjoy a Bleſſed Immortality in the Higheſt Heavens for Ever and Ever. *AMEN.*

FINIS.